NEW
NICK CARTER WEEKLY

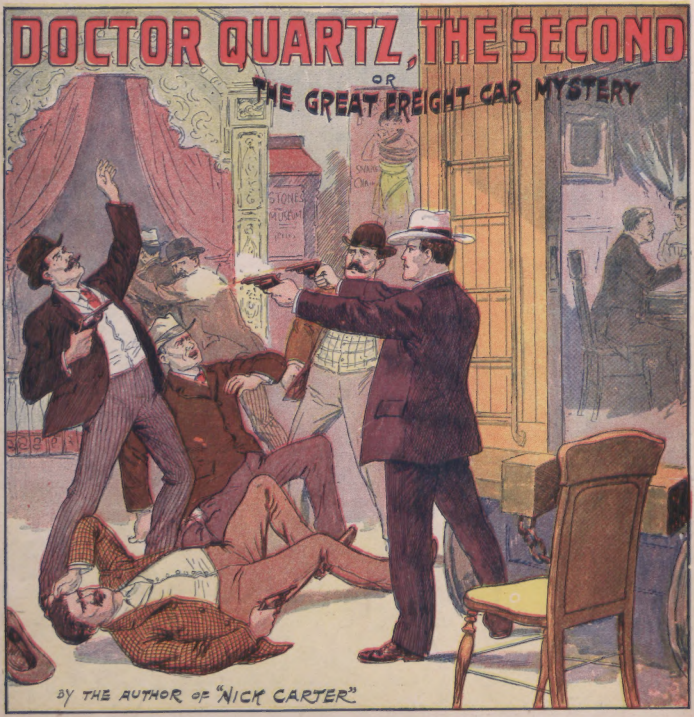
Issued Weekly. By Subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 413. Price, Five Cents.

DOCTOR QUARTZ, THE SECOND

OR

THE GREAT FREIGHT CAR MYSTERY



Three of the strange foes were down before they could use their weapons, the remaining two pitched to the floor with bullets in their legs, while Nick Carter had not moved from his tracks.

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No. 413. NEW YORK, November 26, 1904. Price Five Cents.

Dr. Quartz, the Second;

OR,

THE GREAT FREIGHT CAR MYSTERY.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

JEREMY STONE'S GREAT CASE.

Nick Carter swung from the forward platform of the smoking car to the floor of the station, purposely dropping his gripsack in a clumsy fashion and stumbling forward so that he nearly sprawled his length upon the planks as he did so.

"Gosh all hemlock!" he exclaimed, with the unmistakable twang of a Yankee farmer, as he picked himself up and recovered possession of his lost property, 'wouldn't Mirandy give me the merry ha! ha! ha! ef she saw me do that air! Geewhilikens! Jerusha! Gosh!"

The people around him were laughing good-naturedly at his discomfiture, and perceiving the fact, he wheeled in his tracks and addressed the man who happened to be nearest to him.

"Say, mister, maybe you think you could do it better; hey? I cal'late that I kin drive a yoke of oxen ez well ez the next feller, an' thet I kin pick up more pertaties in an hour than any man in Wyndham Caounty, back in the State of Vermont, but I'll be eternally consarned ef I kin git onto the curves of thet air train of cars, an' I've been on the confounded thing fur nigh onto a hull week, too. When I go back, I'm goin' to walk. Say!"

"Well, sir?" inquired the man he had addressed, laughing in spite of himself.

"Don't sir me, if you please. I'm jest plain Joshua

Juniper, I am. Josh, I'm mostly called back East. But, say!"

"Well?"

"This here town is Kansas City, ain't it?"

"Certainly."

"Well, where's the city? I don't see nothin' but a lot of railroad tracks, a muddy river and a high bluff. Ain't there any city around here?"

"Yes; right over the top of that bluff. You take the car——"

"No, I don't. Not on yewer life, young man. I've taken all the cars I'm a-goin' tew; and all the cars have taken me that's a-goin' tew. Walkin' is good enough for me. Do I go over that air hill?"

"Yes; straight over the top of it."

"Gosh! Say; ain't there a path, 'r something to foller?"

"There's the street where the cars go. You'll find it rather steep walking."

"Steep! Say, did you ever climb the Glebe, 'r old Cobble, 'r Markham, 'r any of them little hills of ourn back in Vermont? No? Well, the fellers what air raised among them air hills wouldn't call this bluff of yours anything at all; they'd jest kick it out of the way, they would. Say!"

"Well?"

"Yew don't happen tew know a feller what runs a dime museum here, dew yew?"

"Yes, I do."

"Shaw! Yew don't say so! Now, I wonder ef yew happen tew know Jeremy Stone; hey?"

The man started visibly, peered closely into Nick Carter's imperturbable face, and replied:

"Yes; I do know such a man."

"Git out! Do yew, now? Yew don't say so? Gosh! Say!"

"Well?"

"Yew couldn't tell me where I could find him, could yew?"

"You are talking to him now," replied the man, coolly.

"Geewhilikens!" exclaimed Nick, in well-simulated surprise. "Ef that don't beat all! Say!"

"Well?"

"I've got a letter in my pocket fur him."

"Then you had better give it to me, for I am Jeremy Stone," replied the stranger.

"Yep," continued Nick, as if he had not heard the last remark. "I've got a friend back East who told me that Jeremy Stone wanted a new freak, and he reckoned that I was about the biggest freak he knowed, so he gave me a letter of introduction."

"Very well; let me see it."

"He said mebby you'd be a-standin' on the platform at the station a-waitin' fur me, and I jest sized yew up fur Jeremy when I spied yew."

"Where is the letter?"

"Right here;" and Nick produced a much crumpled envelope from his pocket and gave it into the hands of his companion. "Mebby you'd better walk over to that winder while yew read it," he added. "I see a lot of rubber-necks around here—more'n we've got back East, a darned sight, too!"

Several spectators who had drawn near to them in curiosity, stepped back hastily at this remark, and Nick looked around at them and smiled while Jeremy Stone followed his suggestion and crossed the platform to a window, where he opened the letter.

What he saw when he did so was a letter which he had written himself; one that he had written and sent to Nick Carter, in New York, a week before. It was as follows:

"My Dear Mr. Carter: I am still in the museum business, as you will see by the heading, although I have transferred my establishment from San Francisco to Kansas City. We have never happened to meet since the famous Dr. Quartz cases, several years ago, and you will remember that it was I who started you on that case by calling you West to investigate the great piano box mystery.

"Well, I've got something on hand now which is fully as mysterious as that was, and if I didn't know that Dr. Quartz was dead, I should say that he or his ghost has had a hand in this affair.

"If you are not too busy, and have a mind to take a run out here to investigate the affair, I'll pay your expenses and make it worth your while besides

whether you take up the case or not; and if you do take the case—well, you know me!

"Wire me if you decide to come, and I'll meet you at the station."

The letter was signed with his own name—Jeremy Stone—and it was in fact the identical letter he had sent to the great detective.

Then, like a flash, it came over him that the green countryman who pretended to have come from Vermont, was none other than Nick Carter himself; so he folded the letter, placed it in his pocket, and returned to the spot where the detective was awaiting him, and where there had now collected quite a crowd of rubbernecks, as Nick had called them.

"All right, Mr. Juniper," he said. "If you won't ride in a car, I don't suppose you have any objections to taking a carriage, have you?"

"Anything from a hay rack to a side-bar buggy will suit me few death, Mister Stone," replied Nick.

"This way, then;" and Jeremy Stone led the way through the station.

The two were presently seated inside a closed hack and being driven rapidly toward the city.

"You fooled me all right, Nick, that time," said Stone.

"Did I? Well, I did it only on general principles. You know you said nothing of what the case was, and thought it would be just as well to come here without announcing to the world who I am. Where are we going now?"

"I thought I'd take you to the Coates House."

"Nonsense! You don't live there, do you?"

"No. I keep bachelor's quarters on Oak Street."

"Well, let's go there. It is quiet, isn't it?"

"It is quiet enough."

"Then that is the place for us."

When at last they were seated in Mr. Stone's apartments, and Nick had restored his appearance to its natural self, they seated themselves facing each other across a table which was between the windows.

"Now," said Nick, "what is it? You see I took you at your word, and came at once."

"Yes, and I am very glad of it."

"The fact is," said Nick, reminiscently, "I never got quite so much experience out of any case in my life, than I did out of the Dr. Quartz business, and I figured that you would not send for me, and write such a letter as you did, unless you were reasonably certain that it was important."

"Certainly not."

"Besides, I happened to have a little spare time on my hands just now; that is, I wanted to have. I wanted to get away from New York for a while. They seem to think there that I am a steam engine, and that all that's necessary is to shovel in more coal to keep me going night and day. To tell you the truth, it seems good to get away for a while."

"I should think it might."

"What is this case of yours, Stone?"

"It's a dandy, I think. You remember that it was a piano box before; well, it is a whole freight car this time."

"Yes; I remember. That other time, you bought a piano box at auction, when the express company sold its unclaimed goods; and you expected to get a fine upright piano, but, instead, you found an empty box, upholstered in approved style, with an inner lining of lead to give it weight, and we discovered together that a man and woman had traveled inside that thing all the way from New York to the Pacific coast."

"And that the man, who proved to be Dr. Quartz, had murdered the woman who was his companion, etc., etc."

"Exactly."

"Well, if this case don't beat that one, I'm a Dutchman, that's all!"

"How does it beat it?"

"In every way. You never saw such a complete thing in all your life. It is practically the same thing over again, only with improvements. Unless I am greatly mistaken, a second Dr. Quartz has appeared on the scene, and this one can give the other cards and spades and beat him at that."

"Then he's a smart one, and no mistake."

"Wait. You shall see and hear for yourself. I'll

tell you all I can about it; after that I'll take you to the spot and give you a chance to see for yourself. If you don't say it is the most interesting puzzle that has come under your observation for many a day, I'll eat my hat, that's all."

CHAPTER II.

THE FREIGHT-CAR MYSTERY.

"This is my story," said Stone, lighting a cigar and leaning comfortably back in his chair:

"The morning of the day I wrote you that letter, I went down to the freight yards to look for a consignment I was expecting."

"Not this one, I suppose," interrupted Nick, with a twinkle in his eyes.

"No, no, of course not. It was about nine o'clock in the morning when I got there, and I very soon learned that the freight I was expecting had not arrived. The superintendent, or foreman—whatever you are pleased to call him—of the freight yard, is an old acquaintance of mine, and as I was coming away I stopped to talk with him. I gave him a cigar and we sat down on a truck and began to talk.

"While we were talking, I noticed a freight car on one of the sidings which appeared to be almost new, and for some reason which I cannot explain, the mere outside of the car seemed to fascinate me. Presently I called Durland's attention to it.

"'What is in that car?' I asked him.

"'I'm blowed if I know!' he replied. 'I wish I did.'

"'Why?' I asked him.

"'Well, for one thing, the car is in the way,' he said. 'I've had it buckled around from one place to another until I'm tired of it; but now I've got it where it don't give me much trouble. It ought to be claimed, but nobody seems anxious about what's inside it.'

"'What's the story about it?' I asked him, then. And this is what he told me:

"It seems that the car had already been in the yard more than three weeks, so it is about four weeks now since it arrived. It is billed to Z. T. Rauk, Esq., and it is marked, as is also the bill of lading which accompanies it: 'To be held in the yards until called for by the owner.'"

"Humph!" said Nick.

"Just what I said," commented Stone. "Now," he continued, "I find that it is not an unusual thing for cars to be marked in that way, provided that there are three rules governing such cases complied with."

"What are the rules?"

"First, there is an affidavit accompanying the bill of lading which states that the car contains nothing perishable, combustible or explosive, and a lot more things of the same kind. Second, five dollars a day must be paid to the company for every day over a week which the car remains uncalled for at its place of destination, and an amount of money sufficient to cover a detention of thirty-one days must be deposited with the company; at the end of that time the company is privileged to open the car, remove the contents to the freight house, where they may be sold at public auction; or the contents of the car may be sold, unseen, to the highest bidder. Third, there must be room in the freight yard at the point of destination for the storage of the car for the original thirty-one days; see?"

"Yes; I understand."

"Well, this car does not bear the mark of any railroad, as its proprietor. There is nothing on it to show who owns it."

"Where is it billed from?"

"Philadelphia."

"What railroad forwarded it?"

"The P. & R."

"And are you sure that it is not one of their cars?"

"It isn't anybody's car. It was billed as a P. & R. car; but there isn't a thing on it to show that it belongs to that company, and investigation has shown that they do not own a car which bears the number which is painted on this one."

"How do you know that?"

"Because I wrote two letters, one to a car-service company, asking about this car by its number, and another to the P. & R. Company, asking the same question. Neither of them ever heard of it."

"But——"

"Don't you see, Mr. Carter, that the car must have been rung in on them in some way? That it was billed in a hurry; that they were led to suppose they were billing one of their own cars, and that in some way the man who shipped the car fooled them?"

"Well, you are building up quite a romance, at least."

"Oh, that isn't all! Wait."

"Go ahead."

"The bill of lading goes to show that the contents of the car consists of household goods, general merchandise, etc., and that all the regulations governing such shipments have been complied with."

"Well, what then? The thirty days aren't up."

"The thirty-one days will expire the day after to-morrow, if I figure correctly."

"In that case, in all probability, Mr. Z. T. Rauk will call for his car about that time."

"I don't think he will. That is just the point."

"Why not?"

"Just take that piece of paper on the table and write down the name of Z. T. Rauk."

"Well, I have done it. What now?"

"Spell the entire name out, backward."

"K-u-a-r-t-z," read Nick, aloud; then he raised his head quickly.

"All you've got to do is to substitute a Q for the K," said Stone.

"I see," said Nick. "You have managed to make Quartz out of the name."

"That is what I have; yes, sir."

"K-u-a-r-t-z spells Quartz all right, doesn't it?"

"It doesn't spell anything else."

"And you have built a romance out of this, eh?"

"I think you will do the same before you are through with it."

"But all your bread will be dough if Mr. Rauk should happen to appear to-morrow or next day, and claim his car."

"He hasn't appeared yet—and I don't think he will."

"Is that all you know about the car, Stone?"

"Practically all; but I expect to find a greater mystery inside it than we found in the piano box."

"If this Mr. Rauk does not appear, the company will open the car the day after to-morrow, according to what you have said."

"The company doesn't have to do it. It only claims that it may do it, if it happens to want the car, or the room it occupies."

"Well?"

"In this case, they do not want the car, for the reason that the car does not belong to them, and it has not been claimed, and they do not need the room it occupies."

"Then they will merely open the car and sell the contents; eh?"

"You will remember that I told you they can do that, or they can sell the contents of the car, unsight and unseen, as we used to say when we were boys."

"But who is likely to buy a pig in a poke in that way?"

"I am. I promise to buy the pig and the poke, too."

"How do you mean?"

"In plain English, I mean that I have offered the company already a large sum for the entire push, provided it is not claimed."

"You mean that you have offered to buy the car as well as the contents?"

"Precisely."

"But, my dear Stone, how can they give you a title to something which does not belong to them?"

"I have agreed to give them a bond, relieving them of all liability on that score; that is, if anybody claims the car and proves ownership, to deliver it uninjured, to the owners, and to pay all damages which may be incurred by my possession in the meanwhile. In a word, the company is quite willing to accept my terms, provided the car is not claimed in the specified time. The company is not interested in the contents of the car, for it has been paid in advance, all that is coming to it. The only liability they are likely to be called upon to settle is for the car itself, and if I insure them against loss in that way, and at the same time put a profit in their hands, it is infinitely better for them than it would be to keep an unclaimed car littering up their yards for nobody knows how long; wouldn't it?"

"Sure."

"I made a clean hundred thousand dollars out of that piano-box affair, and I can afford to lose ten thousand on this one. If, on the other hand, it pans out as I think it will, I will clean up another hundred thousand—or more; see?"

"I see; yes."

"I'm a speculator. I'm in the dime museum business. I make my money by taking risks. I make it just as a farmer makes his by planting corn. If he has a good crop, he wins; if he has a bad season, he loses. I plant my money just as he plants his corn. That is the whole thing in a nutshell."

"Then you have completed your arrangements, and if the car is not claimed, it becomes your property?"

"It does, unless somebody bids over me."

"Oh, I see. They have to make a public auction of it anyhow, eh?"

"Certainly. When the sale is announced, as it will be, at ten o'clock in the morning after the day after tomorrow, my bid will be announced. If there is somebody there who wants the car worse than I do, he'll bid over me—if he can. If not, I take the goods; see?"

"And they already have your offer, eh?"

"Yes; and the bond already made out and signed, sealed, and all that; also, they already have a certified check for the amount which they will return if there is no sale."

"Suppose the owner should appear at the last moment?"

"Why, then he can take his car, when he establishes ownership. I will be out nothing, save what I pay you. But he won't appear, mind that. You'll find a mystery inside that car, as sure as shooting. That's what I brought you here for. That is why I want you to open that car yourself. It's my scheme of advertising, and it is a good one. And now, all you have got to do till Thursday morning is to amuse yourself. Thursday morning, as soon after ten o'clock as it can be done, you and I will enter that car."

"Done!" said Nick

CHAPTER III.

A WOMAN IN A VEIL.

The detective had forwarded what baggage he thought he would need, by express, and as soon as his interview with Jeremy Stone was ended, he went to the office and claimed it.

Next he sought a quiet boarding place where he had stopped before when in Kansas City, and which afforded special facilities for his work, and having established himself there, he arrayed himself in overalls and jumper, cap and boots, and sought the freight yards described by Mr. Stone.

He had no difficulty in finding Bill Durland, the foreman of the freight yards, to whom he at once applied for a job.

"Nothin' doin'," replied Durland to his request. "Got more men than I want now. Maybe after next week I might put you on as an extra."

"All right," said Nick. "I'll look around about that time. Say; this is a comfortable yard to work in, ain't it, boss?"

"Bet your life it is! I keep it so, too."

"That's right. Hello! What kind of a car is that one there?"

"What one?" asked Durland, without looking up.

"That one;" and Nick pointed toward the very car which he knew, by its appearance, should be the one which Stone had described to him.

"Oh," said Durland, raising his eyes, and grinning. "That is an orphan."

"Orphan?" asked Nick, inquiringly.

"Yep! Ain't got any father 'r mother, as far I know. Nobody claims it; nobody seems to want it, unless it is Jeremy Stone, and what in blazes he's going to do with it is more than I can guess."

"Who's he?" asked Nick.

"Runs a dime museum."

"Oh," said Nick. "Say, that's a funny car, ain't it?"

"It ain't any funnier than the others, as I can see," replied Durland.

"It ain't got any railroad's name on it, has it?"

"Didn't I say it was an orphan?"

"I thought you was joking."

"Well, I wasn't. It came here from Philadelphia. The bill says it is filled with household goods. It's going to be sold Thursday morning. Maybe you'd like to buy it."

"Maybe I would. Say!"

"What?"

"Can I take a look at it?"

"Sure. Who's holding you?"

Nick leaped down from the freight house platform and crossed the tracks to the car.

Outwardly it was an ordinary freight car in everything save that it had a decided appearance of newness, and that it bore no painted display of ownership.

It had been painted a dirty red, and it required only a slight study on the part of the detective for him to determine that dirt had purposely been mixed with the paint before it was spread on the car.

But even this had failed to produce the desired result when one viewed the car from a reasonable distance. True, a chance observer, who saw it among a train of others, would not have devoted a second glance to it, because from a little distance it had the same appearance as its companions.

Nick began at one end of the car and walked entirely around it, and he could not in such a rapid and careless examination see wherein it was different from thousands of others he had seen, save for that one thing, its newness.

The bunkers at the ends were the same; the doors at the sides seemed to be the same, and he noticed also that they were carefully sealed; the iron work was the same; the couplings were the same, and of the latest approved pattern.

It was an up-to-date car in every respect, and from the outside there was certainly nothing mysterious about it.

He read the tag that was tacked against the doors, and smiled at the name, for now, since all that Stone had said about it, he could see nothing save that suggestive word, Quartz.

Z. T. Rauk stared at him from the paper tacked upon the door, and yet try as he would, it read Quartz to him from every direction.

"What nonsense!" he muttered to himself. "Quartz is dead. I happen to know that; and he could not very well come to life again, that's sure. This is a mere coincidence, out of which Stone has built up another alarming case. Oh, well, I haven't long to wait now till the car will be opened, anyhow."

He was turning away when he discovered that Durland was standing close to him, observing him, and with a smile on his shrewd, good-natured face.

"Well," he said, "what do you think of it?"

"I don't think," said Nick.

"Want to buy it?"

"Guess not, old man. Ain't exactly in my line."

"More in Jeremy Stone's, eh?"

"Who is Jeremy Stone?"

"I told you that once. He runs a museum."

"Oh. What's he going to do with it?"

"Stuff it, I reckon, 'r set it to music, 'r teach it to jump a rope, 'r do an act on a loop the loop. You can search me."

"Ain't nobody claimed it, eh?"

"Nit! Not a soul."

"Anybody been here to look at it?"

"Oh, two 'r three, I reckon. There was a woman down here yesterday afternoon who pretended she was looking for some freight that hadn't come yet, but she didn't fool me. She came here to take a look at that car, as sure as you're born."

"What do you suppose she wanted to see it for?" asked Nick, interested at once.

"You can search me. I made up my mind that Jeremy sent her."

"Oh; Stone. What kind of a looking woman was she?"

"Guess again, partner. I couldn't tell whether she was black or white, only that she had the sweetest, purtiest voice you ever heard."

"All covered with a veil, eh?"

"Yep. Veil and black gloves that went 'way up her sleeves to her shoulders, for all I can tell; and a figger like a—a——"

"Sylph?" suggested Nick, laughing.

"Well, I suppose so. I don't just know much about sylphs, but that would about hit her case, I reckon."

"What made you think she came here to look at the car?"

"Why, because she did look at it. She asked me a lot of questions about her supposed consignment of freight, and then she spied the car. The next thing she did was to start across the tracks and study the thing, and I sat over there in the doorway watching her, and grinning, for I saw through it all in a minute. When she came back, I said: 'Purty car, that, madam?'

"She looked at me a minute and then she said: 'Freight cars are so interesting.'

"'Sure thing,' says I. 'What's inside that one?' said she; and I told her she could search me from top to bottom without finding an answer. 'Nobody seems to know what's in it, or who it belongs to,' I said. 'It's going to be sold at auction, Thursday, at ten o'clock in the morning. Maybe you'd like to buy it,' says I.

"'Thank you,' says she; and then off she goes without another word."

"And have others been here to see it, too?"

"Oh, yes. There was a man—two men, in fact. They came together about a week ago, but I can't swear that they came to see that car."

"You only think so, eh?"

"Well, it looked like it. They came here together, about five o'clock in the afternoon, pretendin' they was looking for a car, and I, thinking maybe they was the ones who owned this one, took 'em straight to it. But the big one of the two merely shrugged his shoulders and said that wasn't the one, and turned away; but the other fellow—the little one, only he wasn't so little after all, save by comparison with the other—he sort of hunched around a little closer to the car, and he rubbered there for ten minutes or more before he seemed to be satisfied."

"What did he say or do then?"

"Nothing, only lighted a cigar and said he guessed their car wasn't there. They went out after that, without taking any trouble to search further, which is what made me think they came here to see that car, fo there are two dozen here, or more, which they didn take the trouble to inspect."

"You didn't know who they were, eh?"

"Narry; and I know most every business man ir Kansas City by sight, too."

"You know a lot of people, don't you?"

"Reckon I do, partner. For instance, I'll know you the next time you show up here, and I will know after you have gone that you came here to see that car, too."

Nick laughed aloud.

"You're all right, Durland," he said. "Maybe I did I was just thinking that maybe I'd buy the car."

"Then you'll have to bid high, I can tell you that."

"Why?"

"Well, I hear that Jeremy Stone has put in a bi that would make your hair curl; and if I am any judg of human nature, there will be somebody at the sal to put in a bid or two for that woman with the swee voice."

"You think so?"

"I'd bet my life on it."

"Why?"

"Well, I ain't got any good reason, only that I thin so; and if I am right, there'll be another bidder a well."

"You don't say so. Who?"

"One of them men. You see, I expect to see son fun out of that car before I'm through with it. Yo see. And say, to tell you the truth, I'm beginning get spooky about it, too. I only hope they won't fin that it's filled with corpses."

CHAPTER IV.

JEREMY STONE'S SPECULATION.

Nick Carter decided that he would not appear at t sale of the car.

Of course he intended to be there, and was ther but it was in the character of a spectator, and in a d guise which even the announced shrewdness of Fo man Bill Durland failed to penetrate.

The detective was somewhat surprised by the notoriety of the car in question.

He had not supposed that its presence was known, save to a very few among whom Jeremy Stone was the leading spirit; but such news as that concerning the car travels apace, and as the hour of ten approached on that Thursday morning, a crowd began to collect, until finally, when the sale was announced, there were upward of a hundred persons present to see and hear all that should take place.

The auctioneer began by detailing the history of the car so far as it was known.

"Briefly," he announced, "the car was shipped here under a regulation between the railroads"—and he proceeded to describe what Jeremy Stone had already outlined to the detective. Then he continued:

"The car came from Philadelphia. An owner of the car cannot be found. The railroad which forwarded it here repudiates it. Nobody has claimed it; and there it is.

"I wish also to tell you that although the bill of lading recites that it contains household goods and merchandise, the car is very light. It weighs, in fact, only a few thousand pounds more than the bare car should weigh.

"The company has no established right to dispose of the car itself; merely the contents. But the company has decided to dispose of the whole thing to any person who will give back a bond indemnifying it from loss by the transaction.

"Mr. Jeremy Stone, of this city, has offered such a bid, supported by such a bond, and has made a cash deposit to substantiate it.

"I will announce his bid, and if any person here is disposed to exceed it, and to support his offer as substantially as Mr. Stone has done, such an offer may be made within the next five minutes. If at the end of that time the bid has not been increased the car and contents will be knocked down to Mr. Stone.

"His bid is ten thousand dollars."

Nick Carter was seated on a dry-goods box within earshot of the auctioneer, and in such a position that he could see the faces of the crowd which had gathered to witness the sale. That is, he was partly back of the auctioneer so that he faced the crowd.

He had watched narrowly every face which suggested interest to him, and he had no difficulty in picking out among them the two men to whom Durland had referred; the big man and the little man.

But it was not until the auctioneer had mounted his box and began to talk, that he saw a woman there at all.

Just at that moment, however, a carriage drew up at the platform of the freight house, and a middle-aged, angular, sour-visaged woman got out and took a position where she could see and hear.

The curtains of the carriage were drawn so that he could not view the interior, but he had not a doubt that it contained another occupant, and that the other was the lady with the sweet voice to whom the freight-house foreman had referred.

He was positive that the angular woman who had left the carriage was not the one.

However, not a person in that throng raised a voice to increase the offer already made in writing by Jeremy Stone.

Minute after minute went by until the allotted five had elapsed, and there was no interruption.

Neither the angular woman nor either of the two men seemed to take any interest in the matter other than to watch the proceedings as the others who were gathered there did.

Then the auctioneer closed his watch with a snap and mounted his box a second time.

"Time is up," he announced. "Do I hear any bid in excess of Mr. Stone's? No? Once! Twice! Three times! No bid? Sold to Mr. Stone under the stipulations agreed upon."

He descended from the box and disappeared in the direction of his offices.

Jeremy Stone, on the outskirts of the crowd, smiled and rubbed his hands together.

Then he raised himself and looked long and searchingly around the place, seeking such face for Nick Carter; but the detective had taken care to arrange his disguise so that even his employer would not rec-

ognize him, and he remained placidly seated where he was, in the meanwhile keeping his eyes and his ears open for news.

There are always boys who frequent crowds of the sort that was gathered there, and this occasion was not an exception.

Two boys were seated on a plank immediately in front of the detective, and if Jeremy Stone had not been so occupied at the time of Nick Carter's arrival at the Union Station, he would have noticed that both of them had left the same passenger coach from which Nick Carter had debarked, only that they left it by the other door, and instantly disappeared in the crowd at the station.

Now, as Nick Carter saw that a number of people were collecting about Stone, where he remained, rubbing his hands, he left his perch upon the box and approached him, managing, as he did so, to pass quite close to the two lads already described.

"Patsy," he said, "you are to follow the two men with the silk hats. Report at my rooms as soon as you know anything."

"Correct, sir," replied Patsy, without moving or turning his head.

"And Ten-Ichi," added Nick, "your game is the woman and the back. I suspect the one I care most about is inside the carriage, out of sight."

Then he continued on his way toward Jeremy Stone.

The crowd was already clamoring to know when he intended to open the car, but Jeremy still smiled and still rubbed his hands together.

At last he announced:

"Gentlemen, you know I have bought this thing on a speculation. I have already secured a permit from the city authorities to take the car through the street on the street-car rails, and by night I shall have it safely housed in my museum.

"I cannot say, just now, when the car and its contents will be opened for the inspection of the public, but that will be duly announced in my advertisements."

"You said in the meantime you will have plenty of chance to surf it with whatever you like, and then expect us to believe you found it all in the car," called out one of the spectators.

"Not on your lives! That is not what I intend to do. The chief of police and a committee of citizens selected by him will be present when I open the car, and he will guarantee that I have not stuffed it, as you say.

"That is all. The interior of the car will not be seen until it is viewed inside of my museum. The price of admission will be the same; ten cents."

He turned away to give some directions; but as he did so, Nick Carter's keen eyes saw that the larger of the two men who interested him cast one quick, but significant glance out of the corner of his eye at a third man whom the detective had not before noticed.

And this third man started off at once, carelessly sauntering in the direction taken by Jeremy Stone.

"Aha!" thought Nick. "There is their go-between. I wonder how much he knows? Probably mighty little. However——"

He paused abruptly, and then he also sauntered carelessly after the museum owner and the man who was following him.

Stone halted once on his way to the street car, and looked behind him, evidently disappointed because he could find no traces of the detective. But then he smiled, and muttering to himself: "There is no knowing the ways of Nick Carter," he started again for the car, boarded it, and was carried rapidly toward the center of the city.

Nevertheless, there were two who followed closely behind him.

One was the man whom Nick had noticed as being put upon his track by the tall man in the silk hat, and the other was Nick Carter himself.

Inside the car, the stranger seated himself next to Stone, and they had not proceeded far before he opened conversation with him.

Nick Carter had, in the meanwhile, seated himself so that he could see and hear all that passed between them.

"That is a mighty mysterious car, sir," began the man; and Stone smiled complacently as he replied:

"Maybe so."

"It is merely a speculation on your part, I suppose?" continued the man.

"Sure. What else? That is my business; speculation."

"What do you expect to find in it, Mr. Stone?"

"Well, I can't say," drawled the museum owner. "I might find a house and lot, or an Anaconda mine, or a man-'o-war, or a Chinese mandarin; really, I haven't thought much about it, except to make fellows like you ask questions. That's where I collect my dimes."

"Suppose it should disclose a crime?"

"Eh? A crime? Say, stranger, if it does that, it is worth twice what I gave for it. That's a good idea. I hadn't thought of that."

"It might be a regular funeral car, full of corpses, for all you know."

"Sure thing! And it might be a cattle car, filled with jackasses, for all I know, too."

"Maybe they'd have you inside, Mr. Stone, if that was the case," drawled the stranger.

Jeremy looked at him for a moment out of the corner of his eye, and then he said:

"Maybe so; but I'd be a dead one, and not a live and breathing one, like you; so?"

"Seriously, Mr. Stone, what'll you take, in the way of dollars, to let me be present and see that car when it is opened? I'd be willing to give a five-dollar bill, I'm that curious."

"Would you? Well, I hadn't thought of that. Maybe it's a good idea."

"Sure it is. I have no doubt there are others who would give a like amount."

"What! When they could all wait a day or two and see the whole thing for ten cents?"

"Yes; I think so."

"Well, I don't. I don't believe there are many more of your breed in the city, mister. But say! You come around to my place this afternoon, about four, and have a nice, new five-spot with you, and maybe I'll let you in. I'll think about it."

"I'll be there, Mr. Stone."

"All right. I'll expect you; and say! If you find two or three more like you, bring 'em along."

It was an inspiration which suggested this remark, and Nick Carter smiled in approval.

CHAPTER V.

BURGLARS AT THE DOOR.

"Jeremy," said the detective, when he and the museum owner were at last closeted together in the latter's private office, "what time do you expect that car will get here?"

"Oh, about two or three o'clock this afternoon. I thought I'd open the thing about four."

"I don't want you to do that."

"Eh? No? Why not?"

"I'll tell you presently. You brought me out here to boss this job for a little while, didn't you?"

"Sure. What's the matter now?"

"Well, you skip along up to the chief of police, and tell him that you have arranged for the private opening to take place at ten o'clock to-morrow morning."

"But that will throw me off my trolley for a whole day."

"And create all the more excitement."

"Maybe so. But why do you want me to do that?"

"Because I wish to examine that car before even the chief of police has an opportunity to do so. I want to know everything that is in it, and all there is about it that it is possible to find out, before others do; especially the police."

"But, man, you can't get inside the thing without breaking the seals."

"I think I can. Anyhow, I wish to try."

"When? To-night?"

"Yes. In the middle of the night, when we are sure to be undisturbed."

"Just you and me, alone?"

"Precisely. Just you and me, alone."

"B-rrr!" said Stone, with a suggestive shrug of his shoulders. "I don't think I fancy the job."

"Then you may remain at home and leave me to do it alone."

"What do you take me for? I wouldn't do that, not for a thousand."

"It strikes me that you are almost as big a jackass as the chap on the car, aren't you, Jeremy?" asked Nick, with a grin.

"You heard that, did you? What did you make of that fellow?"

"Only enough to know that I wish you to accept his five dollars, and let him in, together with the two men whom I think he will bring with him."

"But I told him to be here at four this afternoon."

"That won't make any difference. Put a placard on your door, announcing that the private opening will take place to-morrow morning at ten, and that all who have sufficient curiosity to spend five dollars for the favor will be admitted at that time for that amount. Say, also, that whatever money you take in at that time will be given to charity; that the money will be collected by a policeman, and that the opening will be in charge of the chief of police."

"By thunder, Nick, you ought to have gone into the dime museum business; you had!"

"Will you do that?" asked the detective, smiling.

"Betcher life I will."

"All right. Go and attend to it at once. You have got your hands full to-day to get the car here and have it properly stored."

"You're right I have. Where shall I put it, Nick?"

"I'd move the walrus tank back and place the car directly in the center of the room."

"Correct. I'll do it. That will give us plenty of room to work to-night."

"Exactly."

* * * * * * *

When the doors of the museum closed at half-past ten that night, Nick Carter and Jeremy Stone remained inside the building.

And they were alone. Even the night watchman had been dismissed for the night, and in order to get rid of him without having him to suspect the purpose, he was sent away out of the city on a supposed errand for his master.

The car—the mysterious car—stood in the very center of the great room, and it looked dark and forbidding as well as terribly out of place in its new quarters.

Jeremy shuddered every time he glanced in that direction, and once, when a rat scurried across the floor under it, he started and seized the detective by the arm.

"Better go home, Jerry," said Nick. "You'll have me rattled before you get through."

"The blooming thing gives me a pain," responded Stone, shuddering.

"You'll have more than that to frighten you before the night is over, unless I am greatly mistaken," said Nick.

"How so? What do you mean?"

"Oh, I don't know; only I shouldn't be surprised if burglars tried to get in here before morning."

"Burglars! What in thunder would they want here?"

"The car," replied Nick.

"Oh! You mean——"

"I mean that if those men and those women were as deeply interested as they seemed to be somebody will try to see the inside of that car before we do. I think the postponement of the private opening was a godsend to them, Jerry."

"Humph!" said Stone, and lapsed into silence.

The windows of the museum were thoroughly darkened so that not a ray of light could steal out and thus betray the fact that the proprietor and the detective were inside.

Midnight came, but, nevertheless, the detective still remained seated in the private office coolly smoking a cigar, and not making a move toward the mysterious car.

"Say," said Stone, when the clock on the wall struck one, "are you going to sit here all night?"

"I'm going to sit where I am and remain quiet until about three o'clock," replied the detective.

"What in blazes are you going to do that for?"

"Because I wish to see if anybody will attempt to

get into the museum to-night. If the attempt is not made before three o'clock, it won't be made at all; and I will have all the time I wish after that."

"You've been hanging around the car, looking at it, crawling under it and climbing over it, anyhow, for the last two hours," growled Stone.

"Sure thing. And I have completed all my preliminary search. We won't have any trouble in getting inside the car without breaking the seals, and I think two hours inside will be all we will require."

"Do you mean to say that you have found a way to get inside it?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"I'll show you before long. There is one way to get inside the car without disturbing the doors, that I already know about, and I suspect that there are two or three more ways of getting out of the car when you are once inside it, Jeremy."

"Nick, you're a crack-a-jack."

Nick laughed.

"No, Jerry," he said, "I am just a detective who reasons things out a little before beginning work, that is all."

"I wish you'd tell me how you reasoned out a way to get inside that car. Why, just think of it. If you had come here a little sooner, and had done that reasoning before I bought the car, I might have known what was inside of it before I made the purchase."

"It is you who are the crack-a-jack now, Jerry," laughed the detective.

"I could have gone up to the freight yard in the night," pursued Jeremy, "and I could have posted myself thoroughly before the sale came off; and——"

"And got yourself arrested and shut up in jail for your pains; eh, Jerry?"

"Maybe so."

"It is better as it is; don't you think so?"

"Maybe so. All the same, I'd like you to tell me how you found a way into the car."

"By looking for it. That is what I was crawling under it and climbing over it for. You see, Jerry, we must first start out with the proposition that the car was not built for fun."

"Sure thing."

"And next, that whoever did build it, there was a deep purpose in its construction. If the car was sent from Philadelphia to Kansas City, it was sent for the purpose of conveying something which the man who shipped it did not wish to send openly. If I had time, I would begin at the other end of this job."

"How so?"

"Why, I would find out where and how the car was made, and how it finally got onto the P. & R. railroad tracks. That would not be a difficult matter, I think."

"Well, and then——"

"Then I'd follow up that trail until it took me somewhere. But I didn't have the time to begin at that end, so I had to figure out something for a basis to begin on; and one of the very first things I noticed about the car was that immediately under the roof, all the way around the car, there is a space which is open. It is so small, and is so cleverly concealed, that it is almost impossible to detect it, but all the same it is there, and it was put there to admit air to the car."

"You think so?"

"I am reasonably positive of it; and if that is so, it remains, does it not, that something or somebody expected to be inside of that car who wanted air—or, rather, who needed air?"

"I suppose so."

"Well, the next step in the field of surmise is to ask who or what could be inside the car and need air. Mind you, this is surmise, for we haven't yet been inside, but let us say that there was at least one passenger inside the car—a man or a woman; perhaps both."

"Gee!" said Jeremy.

"He, or she, or they, would need air. They would also need a means of egress and entrance to the car without disturbing the seals, wouldn't they?"

"Maybe so."

"Well, I figured it that way, and I looked for an entrance."

"And you found one?"

"Of course I found one. Haven't I just told you that?"

"And now that you've found it, what are you going to do with it?" asked Jeremy, grinning.

"I'll show you, presently. Hark! What is that? As I live, Jerry. I believe the burglars have come."

CHAPTER VI.

A MIDNIGHT VISIT TO THE CAR.

The noise which disturbed the detective while he was talking with the proprietor of the museum was made by a knocking against the outer door, and Jeremy was for answering it at once.

Nick, however, held him back.

"Wait," he said. "If that knocking is made by my prospective burglars, that is merely a preliminary move to ascertain if there is a watchman on duty. Don't answer it. We will remain quiet and see if they will attempt an entrance when they are satisfied that there is nobody here."

But, although they waited a considerable time, the knocking was not repeated, nor was there a sound to tell that any person was outside the door.

Thus another interval of time passed away, but the watchers were not disturbed; and in the due course of time the hour of three arrived.

"There," said Jeremy. "Thank Heaven it is now three o'clock. If I wait any longer, I shall be a raving lunatic."

"Are you so nervous as all that?" asked Nick.

"'Taint nervousness, it's cussedness, I reckon. Nick, I want to see the inside of that car, that's what's the matter with me."

"So do I."

"Well, let's look at it, then."

"All right. I'm ready."

"Shall I turn on the lights?"

"By no means."

"How are you going to see?"

"With this little instrument;" and he drew his electric pocket searchlight forth and showed it to Jeremy grave.

"Look at it," he said; and he pressed the button, throwing the powerful light squarely into the museum manager's eyes.

Jeremy started back with a cry that might have been heard out in the street, and Nick laughed outright.

"You are nervous, aren't you?" he said. "Well, come ahead. I'll have pity on you now. Ho, for the car of mystery! Come on."

They left the private office, and approached the spot where the car stood, while the detective lighted the way with his pocket light.

"Now, Jerry," he said, when they passed beside it, "we must do this thing with a system. We must work with a method."

"Sure thing!" said Jeremy.

"I'll show you something which has not been discovered by the people who have examined this car while it was in the freight yards."

"What is that?"

"Well, for example, look at those castings;" and Nick threw his light upon the one piece of cast iron after another, which had been employed in the manufacture of the car.

"What of 'em?" asked Jeremy.

"They are home-made, that is all. The man who built the car made his own castings. He did not care to apply to a regular maker for them; or else he knew that he could not get them if he did—or, what is more likely, that he would be traced from them, if he procured them in that manner."

"So he made 'em himself?"

"Precisely. Now, Jeremy, let me ask you a question."

"A dozen if you like, if you will only hurry."

"If you had made this car, and had wished to make a door through which you could enter and leave it without being observed, where is the most likely place for you to select for such a door?"

"Humph! You can search me!"

"In the roof? In the floor? In one of the sides, or both? Or at the ends?"

"I should say in one of the ends."

"Sure. Now, which end?"

"Hey?"

"I asked you which end?"

"Ends are both alike, ain't they?"

"Yes."

"Then it wouldn't make much difference which end, would it?"

"Certainly it would. Suppose the car happened to be the last one on a train of freight cars, and the end in which your door was placed happened to be the one next to the caboose?"

"Gee! That's so."

"You'd want the door on the other end rather badly, wouldn't you?"

"Betcher life."

"So you would figure rather carefully to have the door at the forward end, eh? That is, as the car was bound westward, you would want your door at the west end of the car, wouldn't you?"

"Maybe so. That is, yes; of course."

"This car is still lying east and west, in here, but it has been turned around since it left the freight yard. They probably ran it onto a Y, before they brought it here."

"Sure. But, say!"

"Well?"

"How did the fellow who built it know that they wouldn't run it on a Y half a dozen times before the car got to Kansas City?"

"He didn't. He probably took his chances on that point; unless, as I believe, he took the trouble to study thoroughly every rod of the railroad the car would travel in coming here, before he attempted to ship the car. However, I figured that he did that very thing, and so I looked at what had been the west end of the car, for the door I was sure I would find there. And, Jeremy, I found it just where I expected it."

Jeremy thrust his hands deep into his pockets, turned, and started as if to return to the office.

"Where are you going?" asked Nick.

"I'm going 'way back and sit down, I am. When you get ready to show me that door and the inside of that car, you just send over a messenger boy and announce the fact. Of all the aggravating galoots I ever saw, you take the cake, you do. Here I am, busting wide open with curiosity, and a-standing here trying to be patient, and you doing nothing but preaching. I can't stand it any longer. When you are ready to see the inside of that car, I'm with you, but if you stand there and talk about it any longer, I'll bust. Honest, I will, Nick."

"I was just giving you a little of your own medicine," said Nick.

"My own medicine! How do you mean?"

"Weren't you the most delighted man on earth when you could stand out there in the old freight yard today as the sole and only owner of this freight car, and tell the people who were devoured by curiosity that it wouldn't be opened till you were good and ready to have it done?"

"I suppose I was."

"Well, I am, for the time being, the sole and only owner; see?"

"Confound you!"

"Swear away if you like it and enjoy it."

"Will you show me the inside of that car?"

"Sure."

"When?"

"Right now."

"Go ahead, then."

Nick led the way around to the end of the car, carrying a chair in his hand as he did so.

The chair he placed on the floor to use as a step. Then he stepped back and turned to Stone again.

"It is your car, isn't it, Jerry?" he asked.

"Of course it's my car. What's the matter now?"

"Nothing; only you should be the first to enter it."

"Hey? What's that? The first to enter it? Well, not much!"

"Why not? Are you afraid?"

"Afraid? Who's afraid? I ain't!"

"All right. Get up on this chair."

"What for?"

"So you can open the door."

"But I don't know how to open the da—— infernal door. There, you almost made me swear."

"I'll show you how to open it."

"Go ahead yourself. I'm no hog. I'm willing to look second, I am."

"Get on the chair, Jerry, and open the door."

Jeremy complied, so far as getting upon the chair was concerned; but there he paused.

"Say!" he said. "Suppose there's an infernal machine attached to that door, and the whole blasted push should blow up when I open the door; what then?"

"That is a chance you have to take," replied Nick, with a chuckle. "Surely you won't ask me to run that risk when you are here to do it, will you?"

"All right. Where is your darned door? Show it to me. I'll open it if it blows a hole plum through the bottom of Kansas City."

"That would be a new kind of a boom for the town, wouldn't it. Are you ready, Jerry?"

"Yep. Fire away."

"Here! Take the light. The door opens by pressing a spring at the bottom of the car—at least I suppose it does. I haven't tried it yet. When I press the spring and the door opens, throw your light inside, look around and tell me what you see."

"All right. Let her go."

Nick pressed the spring and, sure enough, a door large enough to admit a man fell open inside the car.

Jeremy, who was standing on the chair ready for action, uttered an exclamation of surprise, and then threw the glare from the detective's searchlight through the opening.

For an instant after that he stood perfectly motionless and silent, and then, with a loud cry, he dropped the light, and reeled from the chair into the arms of the detective.

CHAPTER VII.

BEAUTIFUL INDEED! BUT DEAD!

Jeremy Stone was not unconscious when he fell, and a glance told Nick Carter that nothing more serious than fright was the matter with him.

The detective barely waited to deposit the half fainting man on the floor, when he seized the searchlight and leaped upon the chair himself.

Instantly the interior of the mysterious car was revealed to him, and he did not wonder that Jeremy had been startled almost out of his wits, although he himself only smiled at what he saw.

Still, it was grewsome enough, at best.

He wished now that he had not carried the joke so far with Jeremy, for he had only insisted upon his looking inside; first, because he really expected to find nothing more interesting than an empty car, with perhaps a chest or two inside; a chest or two which might contain the horrors which would be there.

He certainly did not look forward to any such sight as greeted his eyes.

What he did see appeared to be the interior of a beautifully furnished sleeping room—small, to be sure, but sufficiently large, evidently, for the uses to which it had been put.

In the center of the room was a small, round table. In one corner—the far one from Nick's point of view—was a bed. The remaining articles of furniture will be noticed later on, for it was none of these which had so startled the proprietor of the museum, and which at the first glance almost appalled the detective himself.

It was the group around the table, and the figure on the bed which had made Jeremy Stone drop the light and fall into Nick Carter's arms—figures which at first glance, and in the sharp light cast by the instrument in Nick's hands, appeared to be human, although it was at once plain that if they were human, they no longer lived.

"Corpses!" had been Jeremy Stone's first thought; and it would also have been Nick Carter's, had he not already figured upon such a possibility, and decided in his own mind that such a discovery was unlikely.

He turned on the chair and glanced down at Jeremy with a smile.

The proprietor's teeth were chattering, and he was trembling as if with a palsy.

"Come down from there! For God's sake, come down!" he gasped; but Nick continued to smile.

"Brace up, Jerry," he said. "There is nothing to frighten you. These are not living men."

"No; but by the Lord Harry, they're dead ones, ain't they?"

"No; not that, either, unless I make a great mistake. But I'm going inside to find out."

"What do you think they are?"

"Wax figures, I take it; although I may be mistaken."

He did not pause to say more, but stepped through the door inside the car, and approached the table, around which four figures were seated, as if engaged in a game of cards.

As he drew nearer he was conscious of a heavy odor, as of spices unknown to him, although not at all unpleasant to the sense of smell. He remembered now that he had noticed it also, at the instant when the car door was opened, but the fright of his companion had driven it for the moment from his mind.

He noticed, also, with that quick comprehension of detail, which was second nature to him, that the cards on the round table seemed to have been fastened there, as if adjusted in their places by wax or glue, and that the lifelike-looking features were sustained in their respective places by a network of wires which had been wound round and round them for the purpose.

And as he advanced, the strength of the odor increased until, as he came near enough to have touched the figures, it was almost overpowering.

And then he made a startling and well-nigh appalling discovery.

The figures were not made of wax. They were not dummies. They were——

He turned suddenly and returned to the door, at which the face of Jeremy was already appearing.

"Stay where you are, Jerry!" he commanded in a voice which Stone instantly recognized as a serious one. "It is worse than I supposed."

"What is it?" asked Stone, in a breathless whisper.

"Heaven only knows. I can't answer that question until I have investigated a little further; but I don't want you inside to bother me now. Stay where you are."

"All right."

"Have you got half a dozen incandescent bulbs with insulated wire on them which we can attach to the chandelier and lead in here, so I can have plenty of light?"

"Yes; a hundred if you like. We use 'em all over the place."

"Then get me all that the chandelier will accommodate—nine. I want to throw a lot of light on this subject."

"Are they corpses after all, Nick?"

"Yes; I think they are, Jerry; but so perfectly embalmed that even now I am not certain they are not wax, and that the whole thing is a magnificent hoax."

"Hoax be blowed!"

"Get those bulbs and stop talking," ordered Nick.

Jeremy ran away to obey, and returned after a short absence with an armful of bulbs and wires.

A stepladder was then brought, and within a few moments the ends of the insulated wires were adjusted to the chandelier, and Nick soon had nine good electric lights burning inside the freight car.

In order to divide the light from them as evenly as possible, he had Jeremy bring him also a hammer and some staples, and he thus fastened three of the lights to either side of the car, one at either end, and one directly over the middle of it.

"There is scarcely a shadow in the place now," he said to Jeremy, who was standing just outside the door, gazing in open-mouthed horror and amazement at the sights he saw. "Will you come inside?"

"Not on your life. I'm near enough to that where I am."

"Well, stay where you are; but if you speak to me until I give you permission to talk, I will close the door and leave you outside alone."

"Oh, I'll be dumb. But say, Nick, are they corpses?"

"Yes, they are."

"What's that one on the bed?"

"I haven't looked yet. It is covered by a sheet, as you see."

"Well, look and see what it is, and then I'll shut up."

"Hush, Jerry," said Nick. "You must be silent

now. I must do the rest of this in my own way, and I must not be interrupted."

Jeremy Stone lapsed into silence without another word, and Nick turned again toward the interior of the car.

The car was of the ordinary thirty-four foot pattern; in fact, it was of the same dimensions of an ordinary freight car, such as may be seen attached to any freight train, and of the kind which is usually marked "Furniture Car" on the outside.

Every inch of the roof and sides of the car was covered with silk plush of a rich amber color, and this had been fastened in place by brass tacks arranged diamond-shape, while pendent from each tack was a button and tassel of the same quality and hue as the drapery.

This arrangement gave the inside of the car the appearance of being upholstered, although a touch of his fingers told the detective that there was nothing between the silk plush and the boards which formed the inner casing of the car.

At the sides, and at the far end of the car—that is, in three places in all, were brackets for the support of small lamps, and each of the lamps they held had the appearance of having been in use.

In the far corner, on the left-hand side, as has already been mentioned, was a brass bed, of the three-quarter size, and the trappings and furnishings of the bed seemed, at that first glance, to be of the finest and richest material.

The bed, too, seemed to be "made up," although on top of the figured silk coverlid some sort of a substance, or body, was resting. What it was, Nick could not yet determine, for it was completely hidden from view by a white sheet which was spread over it. Nevertheless, it plainly showed the outlines of still another human form, and Nick had not a doubt that it was.

There were two bed coverlids, folded short, and in perfect order in the car, and they were likewise in leather, and of the latest devices. One of these was at one side of the car, near the regular door, which the reader knows was sealed on the outside; the other was nearer the end at which the detective had entered.

There were also several comfortable chairs arranged about the roomy space, and there was a case of well-filled bookshelves hanging against the walls, if walls the sides of the car might be called.

At two places through the length of the car, heavy plush curtains, provided with loops and buttons so that they might be readily fastened together, had been arranged. These were now drawn aside and fastened at the sides of the car, but a glance at them showed that the interior of the strange apartment could, by their use, readily be divided into three separate compartments, thus leaving the brass bedstead in one, and a bed couch, which could be opened and made serviceable for two people, in each of the others.

As Nick ran his eyes again along the sides of the car he discovered where there were places in the silk plush drapery where it was tied down into place.

He crossed to one of these and untied the knot which held it, thus revealing the fact that they were but coverings for sections of the side of the car, about the size of windows, and which might readily be removed and used as such, for obtaining air, and for the purpose of viewing the scenery as the occupants of the car were passing; and slipped down between the plush and the sides of the car, under these windows, were screens which might be adjusted at the whim of the occupants.

The floor of the car was covered from end to end by a heavy Axminster carpet, which had been evidently fitted with great care, and was tacked securely into place. Over the carpet, at intervals, were small rugs and there were foot rests, hassocks, and numerous articles of decoration on every hand.

"What do you think of it all, Jeremy?" asked Nick when he had taken in these details, and as he was alone

to pass to the bed whereon the figure was laid under the sheet. But Jeremy merely shook his head; he did not reply, and, after waiting a moment, Nick crossed to the brass bedstead, and with a quick motion threw back the sheet.

Then he started in wondering awe and amazement, for he found himself looking upon a beautiful face; beautiful indeed—but dead.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CORPSES IN THE CAR.

After that there followed an hour when Nick Carter did not again speak to his companion who remained in the doorway at the end of the car.

He occupied the time in minutely searching every inch of space which the strange car contained: and he began it and conducted it with that same careful regard to system which has always signalized the work of the great detective.

After lifting the sheet from the face of the form on the bed, he replaced it again, and at once returned to the other end of the car.

There he began to study what he saw.

Pressed closely into one corner of the door sill he found a particle of red clay which had escaped the attention of the person whose duty it had been to keep the car clean; also, in two places near the door, he discovered the marks of fingers against the silk plush.

Two or three hairpins; the same number of buttons of various sizes; a stick-pin and other articles of the same class and character were in evidence all over the place, but they told him nothing of importance, and had, he believed, very little bearing upon the general case in hand.

He spent a long time at the table where the four figures were seated, as if engaged in a game of cards; but even there he was careful to touch nothing—to disturb nothing. He very much preferred to leave everything as he found it.

Two of the figures at the table were men; two were women. All were approaching middle age, which is to say that all of them, as nearly as he was able to judge, were—or, rather, had been between forty and fifty years old.

The figure on the bed, covered from sight by the sheet, was that of a young woman who had not yet attained her majority.

Nick judged that she might have been between nineteen and twenty-one years old, but that she certainly was not more than that; perhaps even younger.

From the cursory examination he was enabled to devote to the four bodies at the table, he was unable to determine how they had died, save that he was satisfied in his own mind that death had resulted from the use of some quick poison administered to them.

The perfect state of preservation in which the bodies were found was what amazed him most, and he was not surprised that with his first view into the car, and with the imperfect light he had employed at the time, he should have leaped to the conclusion that they were merely wax figures.

Wax figures they were not, however.

They were the bodies of men and women who had once been warm with life and animation; and seated in the chairs at the table, with the playing cards in their hands and their bodies arranged in natural attitudes, they appeared as lifelike and real as if they were actually engaged in the game before them.

The women were still arrayed in their jewelry. Both were women whose physiognomies showed that they were not unfamiliar with the gas-lighted and the Bohemian side of life in great cities.

And yet there were evidences of refinement and culture everywhere, too. The faces had possessed beauty, even if it was of a reckless kind; and the hands showed

that their owners had been entirely unused to any sort of work with them.

Their costumes were elegant. The material was of the finest texture and after the latest fashion, and the hair of each of them showed that it had evidently been dressed by a person who was experienced in the art.

From their boots to the jeweled combs in their hair they gave evidence of wealth, studied care, even luxury.

And they were—who can tell the age of a woman who has ready at hand all the arts of the toilet? In round figures, they were approximately forty years old; and if gray hairs had ever appeared in the manes of either, they had long ago been harked back to youthful colors by the use of chemicals.

And the men?

They were, to all appearance, men of the world, worldly.

One was heavy-set, beetle-browed, swarthy, and—in death—wolfishly fierce in suggestion, with coal-black hair, here and there relieved by a tinge of gray, a heavy black mustache, and with shirt front, fingers and watch chain bejeweled as only a man after his pattern can decorate himself on occasion.

His *vis-a-vis* was a man of different type altogether. He was younger, although he also seemed to have passed the forty mark; but his hair was light; his long mustache was blond and perfectly trained, and his features were handsome, although dissipated.

A single diamond of great brilliancy gleamed upon one finger of the hand which held the cards before him, and the other hand rested on the table at his side, and still held, as if ready to raise it to his lips, a half-smoked cigar, which in its day had been a perfecto.

Indeed, had it not been for the wire guys and stays which held the bodies in place at the table, the entire appearance of the scene would have suggested to the beholder that some awful blight had struck them while they were engaged in their game and had rendered them lifeless so suddenly that not one of them had had time or opportunity to change a position or a gesture.

Nick Carter passed around them on every side, studying them from every point of vantage he could obtain; but he could discover little more than has been already told.

Here and there, on the men, there was a pocket into which he could insert his fingers without disturbing the body at all, but, as he expected, such investigation led to no discovery whatever.

The pockets were empty, as he believed all of them would be found to be.

So far he had not discovered a scrap of paper in the car; so far he had found nothing of any description which would supply a clew to the identity of the men and women, and he had not a doubt that the person who had arranged the tableau with such exceeding care had taken like precautions to remove every means of identification.

And that person had used extraordinary care in his preparations.

The table at which they were seated, the chairs upon which they rested—in fact, every movable article in the car, had been fastened in its place so firmly that no jarring or jolting could displace it.

Even the cards themselves, as has already been stated, were fastened to the top of the table and to the fingers of the dead men and women who held them.

The scene was extraordinary, unreal, almost fantastical.

With the figure on the bed, all was different.

The body was that of a young woman who had been wonderfully beautiful in life.

A young woman with a perfect figure; with hair as dark as brown hair, which is something less than black, can be; with an oval face, perfect in contour, exquisite in feature, delicate, high-bred and patrician in every line.

A young woman, whose eyes, if they could have opened, would have been round and full and soft, and as dark and as lustrous as sloes; whose lips had been as red as cherries and whose skin was once as smooth and soft as a beautiful woman's skin can be.

And her attire was as if she had dressed for a great function just before she became the bride of death.

The gown she wore might have cost a thousand dollars, or even more; the jewels at her throat were worth many thousands, and the rings upon her fingers as much more.

"Plainly," thought the detective, as he looked upon her, "whoever it was who arranged this terrible scene, he had more thought for its perfection of detail than for the value of jewels and diamonds."

But it was not this which has already been described in such detail, which had caused him to start back in such consternation and amazement when he first removed the sheet covering and looked upon the figure on the bed.

If he were in doubt concerning the means by which the remaining four of the occupants of the car had come to their death, there was no room left for doubt in this case.

The jeweled hilt of a Spanish dagger protruded from the young woman's bosom, directly over her heart, and if the hilt itself gave correct evidence of the length of the weapon, it must, when driven home, have pinned its victim to the bed whereon she was lying.

And still there was nowhere any evidence of blood.

And yet, also, as in the other cases, that same masterly art of embalming had been employed.

The body was almost in as perfect a state of preservation as if life were still extant within it.

But nowhere—there nor elsewhere—was there even a suggestion of a clew concerning the identity of the five occupants of the car.

Nick turned away from the bed after drawing the sheet again into place over the silent form.

For a moment after that he stood in silent contemplation of the several articles he had discovered and collected, which have already been mentioned—that is, the hairpins, and the few trinkets.

After studying them for a while, he shook his head, and then carefully returned them to the places where they were found.

Next he crossed to the lamps, one after another, and devoted some considerable study to them, carefully removing the chimneys, turning the wicks up and down, inspecting the tops of the lamps, where they were exposed, and also the sides of the car near them, the top of the car over them, and the floor of the car under them.

The chairs, and the carpet and rugs on the floor, he also examined with great care, using his large magnifying glass upon the last two articles.

Next, he opened the couch beds, devoted a short study to each of them, and closed them again, leaving them as he had found them.

And then, with his glass, he went carefully along the sides of the car, touching with great particularity upon every point and place where the hand of one of the occupants of the car might have been brought into contact with it.

And finally his investigations were finished.

At last he turned toward Jeremy Stone, where he still remained in the open door at the end of the car.

Then he removed the electric bulbs from the places where he had placed them and passed them outside to his waiting companion, and at last, with a sigh, he passed outside and closed the door behind him.

But as he stepped down from the chair to the floor of the museum, he discovered that standing just behind Jeremy were five grim and silent men, all with revolvers in their hands, covering him.

CHAPTER IX.

DOCTOR QUARTZ, THE SECOND.

"Put up your hands!" ordered one of the men, quietly; and Jeremy Stone, who had no idea of their proximity until he heard the words behind him, started as if he were already shot with a bullet.

But ere he could turn, the same quiet voice added:

"If you turn, Mr. Stone, I will kill you where you stand."

But Nick Carter did not propose to put up his hands and surrender without a struggle, not even when the odds were so great as they were then.

When the order came, he did put up his hands, suddenly and quickly; but the very motion of putting them up threw into their grasp the butts of the small but deadly weapons he always carried in his sleeves whenever he expected to work within the realm of danger.

Nor did he hesitate to make use of them now.

The mere motion of throwing his hands into the air brought his two weapons within his grasp, and as each one was automatic in its use, the words addressed to Jeremy Stone were not fully uttered before the air was filled with the sound of a veritable fusillade of pistol shots.

And Nick Carter's unerring marksmanship, moreover, enabled him to make use of this means of defense without of necessity dealing death around him.

He could wound without killing. He could drive tacks with bullets from these toylike pistols at thirty paces—and he could drive them with the rapidity of counting.

The man who ordered him to throw up his hands received the first bullet.

It grazed his temple, and it whirled him around as if he had been hit with a club, and he pitched to the floor like a log; and the others had evidently relied upon the awe which their leveled weapons would create, and had had no thought of using them.

At all events, not one of them fired.

Three of them were, in fact, down before they could have had an opportunity to do so; two with grazed temples which stunned them, and the other with a bullet through his shoulder.

The remaining two turned to escape, but pitched to the floor with bullets in their legs before they had taken half a dozen steps; and during the *mêlée,* which lasted not more than three or four seconds, there was not a shot fired, save by the detective himself.

And Nick Carter did not move from his tracks.

"The first one of you who tries to raise his weapon to use it, I will shoot through the head," he exclaimed, calmly. "And now, Jerry," he added, "while I keep an eye on them to see that they obey me, you relieve them of their weapons."

A celebrated train robber of Missouri once told the writer that he could at any time kill, with ease, half a dozen inexperienced men who faced him with the guns already in their hands. He explained that he would shoot so quickly and so determinedly that his bullets would all find their marks before the other men would have thought to pull the triggers of their own weapons. And he added:

"The average tenderfoot is more afraid of the damage he will do himself, with a gun, than he is of the weapon that is pointed at him."

If that was true with a member of the Younger gang, of Missouri, one may safely estimate the possibility of havoc which Nick Carter could create with those terrible little weapons he carried in his sleeves, and with the aid of his never varying accuracy in shooting.

In the present instance, Nick scarcely found himself confronted by the five strange foes, ere they were one and all on the floor of the museum, incapable of inflicting damage upon him.

And Jeremy Stone lost no time, under Nick's orders, in procuring ropes with which the five intruders were

bound and helpless; and they were carried by Nick and the proprietor to the private office, and given such immediate care as their wounds required.

Not one of them, however, was seriously hurt.

"Gee!" exclaimed Jeremy, looking at them, and rubbing his hands together in glee as he contemplated the advertising he would get out of the events of the night, "I ought to do a smashing business for the rest of this season, if this night's work counts for anything at all."

"Doubtless you will," said Nick, grimly; and then he turned to the men he had captured so strangely.

"You fellows came here at just the moment when I wanted you most," he said, coldly. "I expected you earlier, but, after waiting for you till three o'clock, I thought I'd go ahead without you. But you aren't, any of you, much good after all, are you?"

The leader, who had recovered from the effects of the blow made by the bullet against the side of his head, and whom Nick addressed, scowled savagely, but made no reply.

"What a pity it is that you are all merely tools; that not one of you is a principal," continued the detective. "Now, my man, you will have to talk. If not now, then at some later time, and you can save yourself a whole lot of trouble by doing it now. For instance, I don't think that I care very much about any of you, and you are more in the way than an advantage to me just now. Do you understand that?"

"I heard what you said," growled the man.

"Well, if you talk now, and give up all you know, I shouldn't wonder if I had much rather you would go about your business for the present, and try to hold up somebody else, than to hamper myself by taking you in. Do you understand that?"

"I heard what you said."

"Good! You're getting sensible, aren't you. Now, do you know what is inside that car?"

"Only what I could see; and I couldn't see very much."

"Well, what did you see?"

"A lot of wax figgers."

"Exactly. Now, what did you expect to find there?"

"I didn't expect to find anything there, because I didn't expect to look to see what was there."

"Oh! You didn't, eh?"

"No."

"What did you expect to do?"

"Blow the blooming thing to blazes."

"What! Blow up the car?"

"Sure, and the hull shootin' match as well."

"I reckon, mister man, that you can talk good English if you are to do so, and you may as well do it. I will understand you better. Who sent you here?"

"A goggle-eyed galoot, who gave us each a hundred dollars to come, and agreed to give us each another hundred apiece, if we returned after blowing up this shebang."

"You were to put dynamite, or something, under the car; is that it?"

"Yes; that's it. Dynamite. It's over there now, all ready, and I might have blown it up a dozen times while you were inside, only I ain't no murderer, and killing you was not in this job; so as there were only two of you, I reckoned that I could hold you up, get you out of harm's way, and then do the job."

"I see. That was very kind of you. What you mean is, that if you just blew up the place without killing anybody, your chances of escape would be much better than if you committed two murders in doing it; eh?"

"Have it that way if you want to. It don't hurt me any."

"Where were you to meet 'the goggle-eyed galoot' who was to give you the extra money after the job was done?"

"In the woman's waiting room, down at the Union Station."

"Were you all to go in a body?"

"No. I was to go alone, and collect the boodle."

"What time?"

"At six o'clock this morning. But say, it won't do you any good to find out all that, for the fellow won't be waiting. He'd know if there was an explosion here, and he'll be mighty shy, I reckon, if he don't hear one."

"Where do you live?"

"Here, in Kansas City. I've got a police record. If you want to find out all about me, all you've got to do is to go to the police department. You see, I'm taking you at your word, thinking that maybe you'll let me go. I'm a crook, and so are these guns here. Some of us are wanted, and some of us ain't. I am, as it happens."

"Did the man who sent you here tell you what was in that car?"

"Not a tell about it."

"Will you all agree to get out of town, and stay out for a year at least, if I decide to let you go?"

"Sure thing."

"Very well; two of your companions can walk, and two are a little lame. You can tell them to light out now. I want you to stay."

"Aren't you going to let me go, too?"

"Yes, when you have pointed out the man who sent you here. You can do it, and you've got to do it."

"All right, boss. I'm game to carry out the contract; only you can bet that after I have done it, I won't come back here in no year—or ten years. I'll take my chances against all the coppers between the two oceans, but Dr. Quartz is a proposition I don't care to tackle, after I've got him down on me once."

"Who?" demanded Nick.

"Dr. Quartz. That's his name."

"Gee!" said Jeremy Stone, and he rubbed his hands together harder than ever.

"Is that the name of the man who sent you here?" asked Nick.

"No; but it's the name of the man who sent the goggle-eyed galoot to us, or I miss my guess. This ain't the first job I've tackled for him."

"Dr. Quartz, eh? A second Dr. Quartz."

"That's what he calls himself. Dr. Quartz, Second."

"Humph! Does he live here in Kansas City?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where?"

"Sure."

"Good! You shall take me there."

"Will I! Not much! I'll show you the house, all right, but I'd rather be railroaded to prison right now, for ten years, than take you there. You hear me?"

CHAPTER X.

FACE TO FACE WITH THE VERY MAN.

Nick Carter was confident, when he had finished with the man, that he had told him all he knew about the car, or the people who had sent him there to blow it up.

His story, in a word, was to the effect that he had been approached by the man whom he described as the goggle-eyed galoot, and offered the price he had stated, on condition that he would get a gang around him, break into the museum and blow up the car so thoroughly that it would be effectually destroyed. He had agreed to do it, and had picked up his assistants for the matter among the slums of the city. They had arrived at the door of the museum at a little before three, but had determined that there were people inside, and had therefore delayed their entrance until after four.

Being expert burglars, they found no difficulty in

gaining admittance to the building, and as Nick Carter was already inside the car, absorbed in his investigations, and Jeremy Stone was so intent upon watching him at his work, their presence in the building had not been suspected until the moment when Nick discovered them as he leaped down from the car to the stair and thence to the floor.

His four companions were sent away as Nick intended they should be; and then the detective turned to Jeremy Stone.

"Jerry," he said, "I will tell you now what I discovered in that car. I will tell it in the form of a story so you will understand it better. Big Jim Gleason, here, burglar and all-around crook, may listen if he likes, for I have no doubt he will be interested; and it will show him how nearly he came to being up against it much harder than he ever expected to be. I have no doubt, also, but that I can make rather good use of Big Jim, a little later on."

"Maybe so," was Jeremy's comment.

"The mention of the name of Dr. Quartz, the second, has supplied the missing link in the chain of circumstantial evidence I have dug up from inside that car; and, in a word, I read the whole thing something like this:

"The person who prepared that car, coolly committed five murders to accomplish his ultimate purpose, and I have no doubt he did it as coolly as he might have manufactured wax figures for the same purpose; and he might have done so, if I am correct, and have carried out his design quite as thoroughly.

"The person who prepared that car as I found it when I entered it, did so, intending that the car should be finally opened by the authorities, in this city, as it will be, at ten o'clock this morning. He intended that the car should remain where it did until it had aroused the curiosity of the entire city—as it did. He intended that it should be sold at auction, perhaps, or at least that it should fall into the hands of some person who would deliver it and its contents into the hands of the authorities.

"He intended, according to my method of reasoning, that this should be his method of striking terror among certain people whom he wished to reach, and, therefore, we may conclude that there are other persons in this city who are as deeply interested in the car and its contents as he is himself.

"I believe that the interior of the car, with all its appurtenances, including the bodies that are there, comprises simply a rehearsal—or, shall I say, a reproduction—of a tragedy which has already taken place.

"That is to say, some time in the past, the four people whose bodies are seated at the table apparently engaged in a game of cards, have murdered a young girl not unlike the one whose body we found on the bed, under the sheet, and that, having driven a dagger through her heart while she was lying, no doubt drugged and unconscious on the bed, they calmly sat down to drink and gamble, in the presence of the corpse.

"And doubtless the room in which the crime was committed was not unlike the interior of that car, although of course much larger.

"The manufacturer of that car, and the man who arranged its interior, doubtless knew, or at least he guessed, something of the scenes which surrounded her death, and it has been his effort here to reproduce, as far and as closely as possible, every detail of that tragedy.

"This seems like rather a far-fetched conclusion for me to deduct, but the entire appearance of the interior of the car suggests it at once; and when I hear Big Jim speak of the principal who is behind the man who sent him here, and refer to that person as Dr. Quartz the second, I am convinced of the correctness of my view; for that is exactly the sort of thing which the

original Dr. Quartz would have taken delight in doing.

"The car has not been used since it was furnished as we found it.

"It was sealed up before it was shipped, and I am certain that it has not been entered or opened since that time, until I opened the door at the end, a few hours ago.

"The little trinkets which I found upon the floor of the car, were thrown there, to give it all a more perfect appearance of reality. The lamps at the sides of the car were lighted only once, and then the wicks were turned high up in order to make them smoke and thus give them the appearance of having been used.

"The finger marks on the plush near the door, were made by the man who arranged the car, and not by anyone of the persons in that car. There is not a finger on any of them which could have made the same marks. If you had studied the science of thumb and finger marks, you would know this to be true.

"The jewelry, the diamonds and all things apparently of great value in the car, are merely good imitations, put there to produce an effect.

"Somewhere, at some time, two men and two women —those same two men and two women, perhaps, although I am not certain of that—have murdered a girl under circumstances which are about the same as those represented in the car. The man who fixed this car knows about it, and is familiar with all the circumstances. The men and the women who committed the murder, if they were not those whose corpses are now in the car—or, if they are the ones, then some other persons who will be affected by the disclosure that is made—are now in Kansas City, and it was the purpose of the one who prepared that car, to so terrorize them, that, through their terror, he could accomplish some infinitely greater purpose which he has in view.

"If the original Dr. Quartz were alive, I should at once say that he had expended a few thousand dollars after this manner, for the purpose of extorting hundreds of thousands, or perhaps millions, from the people he intended to terrorize by this means.

"He would have selected just such a method as this one. He would have taken all that exquisite care to have perfected every detail, and would have spared no expense in carrying out his plan, once it was matured. Does it seem absurd to you? If you had known Dr. Quartz as I knew him, you would not think so.

"Now, Big Jim tells us that somewhere here in the city, there is a second Dr. Quartz. If that is so, then I can finish the story, for such a man could call himself by that name, only if he was heir, in some way, to the vast knowledge and power for evil-doing which Dr. Quartz possessed. I know that he left behind him a written chart of all his secrets, and I know that his charts and diaries and all his possessions relating to science were hidden somewhere, and were intended for some person; but I could never find them, or the person either.

"The finished story, as I would make it—out of nothing you might say, for it would appear as nothing to one who had not had experience with that wonderful man and his methods—merely provides that there are two men and two women—husbands and wives they are, as demonstrated by the wedding rings—here in Kansas City, who have inherited a fortune by the murder of some young woman, and that they are now enjoying that fortune. Dr. Quartz knows about it, and he has decided that he wants that fortune or at least the greater part of it. He has not gone to them and demanded it, because he is more artistic. He has thought it better to speak silently, so that he will not appear in the matter."

"But if all that is true, or even if a part of it is true," said Jeremy, "why should he wish to blow the

to pieces after he has taken so much trouble to epare it?"

"I don't think he did," replied Nick, slowly. "I n't think that Big Jim's Dr. Quartz had anything do with sending the man to Jim, who engaged him blow up the car. I think that fellow was sent by e woman who went to the freight yard to see the r. I think that Dr. Quartz is merely waiting pa-ntly at his home, to have the car opened in the ning according to your announcement; but that me manner, the people who are threatened by the me, have learned something of what is to hap-n. They may not know of the contents of the car, t they have connected Dr. Quartz with it somehow, d they are afraid."

"Maybe so."

Nick looked at his watch and then turned to Big m.

"We will go now," he said.

"Where to?" asked Jim.

"To the house of Dr. Quartz. Come!"

It was almost seven o'clock when Nick Carter ounted the steps of the house to which he had been rected, and rang the bell. Big Jim waited on a earby corner.

When the door opened, the detective could barely press an exclamation of surprise, for the men who od before him was so exactly like that other man, lead, whom he had known for the greatest crimi-of his age and time.

There was the same strong and handsome features; e same square jaw, smoothly shaven face, piercing, illiant eyes; the same wide, high forehead, denoting reat intellectuality; the same massive frame, not ge, but compact; the same intense air; the same sh, superior smile; the same evidence of good breed-—ah! it was all the same.

"Dr. Quartz, I believe," said Nick, coolly.

"Yes," replied the man in the doorway, in a voice which made the detective start as much as other likenesses had done. "Will you step inside?"

Nick followed him into the office, and then, without taking the chair that was offered to him, he said:

"Doctor, the chief of police would like to see you this morning."

The doctor wheeled sharply in his tracks, only to find that he was confronted by a pair of revolvers, one of which was aimed at his heart and the other at his forehead.

"You see," said Nick, smiling, "I get you, no matter which way you attempt to jump—so take my advice and don't jump. You look so much like your namesake, now dead, that I should not stop to bandy words with you."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders and smiled; and when he smiled, his face was transformed to a thing of beauty. Nick marveled that a man could be so handsomely attractive.

"Isn't this rather a high-handed proceeding?" he asked, lazily. "What has happened? What is the matter?"

"The car at Jeremy Stone's museum has been opened," replied the detective, coldly; "and it may interest you to know that I am Nick Carter."

CHAPTER XI.

CONCLUSION.

"Put away your pistols, Mr. Carter," said the doctor, quietly. "You will have no occasion to use them. No? Well, then——"

He spoke quite coolly until the break in the sentence, and when that came, he dropped like a bolt of lightning to the floor, and at the same time darted forward, so that Nick, who had not really considered the necessity of shooting at all, was totally unprepared.

The result was that the next instant the detective

found himself grappling with the man, and that without having fired a shot.

And now he could not. He saw in an instant that it was a mere question of strength between them, and dropping his pistols to the floor, he seized the doctor in his own muscular and wonderfully powerful arms; and then, standing together in something which nearly resembled what is known as the side hold in wrestling, with Nick at the upper hold, the two men strained together in the center of the room.

And then there followed an intense silence. Not a motionless or an inactive one, but a thoroughly strenuous one, for both men were straining with all the might in them to subdue each other; and yet neither moved out of his tracks on the floor—neither gave to or forced upon the other an inch of advantage. The fact was that they were so evenly matched, that it was as if two silent and motionless bodies were standing there, locked together like two statues carved in marble.

Five minutes passed in this way; and then the doctor said, quietly:

"Will you declare a truce for a moment? You need not break your hold. I wish to say something."

"Yes; what is it?"

"You are stronger than I thought."

"Yes."

"I have heard about you. I have, in fact, known considerable about you. I have only struggled with you to satisfy myself that I had heard the truth concerning you. If I had thrown you, I should have permitted you to rise uninjured, and afterward have gone with you to the chief of police. What do you desire of me?"

"To arrest you for five murders. The truce is up now, doctor. I am going to attack again."

With a quick motion, as the detective ceased speaking, he threw one foot behind the physician's and so tripped him. They fell to the floor together, Nick on the top, and in an instant he had snapped handcuffs upon the doctor's wrists.

"You see," said the doctor, "I did not resist that time. I will go with you. But you have had all your trouble for nothing."

"Indeed!" said Nick.

"Yes. You have arrested the wrong person."

"I have heard that sort of talk before," said the detective.

"Open the door behind you, Mr. Carter, and you will discover the real murderers. I captured them myself during the night and was on the point of telephoning for a carriage to take them to the chief when you arrived."

Nick opened the door as he was directed to do, and seated just beyond it, tightly bound in two chairs, he discovered two women, one of whom he instantly recognized as the angular, sour-visaged woman of the freight yard. Both were apparently asleep; both were, in fact, unconscious.

The other woman gave the detective a start when he looked at her, for, save that she was older, she presented almost a counterpart of the young woman on the bed in the freight car.

"There is a telephone over there in the corner," said the doctor, smiling. "You can send to police headquarters directly from here."

Then he shrugged his shoulders and lapsed into silence, nor would he speak again, despite every inducement that Nick could offer.

* * * * * * *

At the police station, it was demonstrated that Nick's surmises concerning the dead occupants of the mysterious freight car were in the main correct, although Dr. Quartz adopted a method of silence in his defense which nothing could penetrate; but the affair ended by all of them being charged with the five murders, all of them were placed under indictment.

Of the car itself, very little more than was already known could be ascertained; but the authorities of Kansas City at once retained the services of Nick Carter to solve the mystery to its core.

THE END.

The next number of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, No. 414, will be entitled "Dr. Quartz II. at Bay: A Man of Iron Nerve." In this story will be told the entire history of the mystery of the mound [illegible]

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